

CENTRAL PLACES, LOCAL ELITES AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: THE HIGHLANDS OF GRANADA IN THE CONFLICT BETWEEN VISIGOTHS AND BYZANTINES, 550-630

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Abstract

Recent research has emphasized the importance of different kinds of ‘central places’ in the articulation of power in the Iberian Peninsula across the late antique and early medieval periods. Such sites were a focus of political, social and economic activity at a local level, also serving to integrate their regions into broader systems such as the emerging Visigothic kingdom and networks of taxation and trade. This article relates central place theory to the study of the highlands of Granada in the sixth century – a period and place with minimal documentary and literary evidence – in order to understand developments in the organization and defence of the territory in the context of conflicts between Visigoths and Byzantines. Particular emphasis is placed on the control of the communications network the exploitation of the best agricultural land, mining and the likely agency of local elites.

Introduction

In the early 550s the Byzantine Emperor Justinian dispatched an expeditionary force to the south of the Iberian Peninsula. Sources suggest that this force was sent in response to a request from one side in a civil war that was then raging within the Visigothic elite.² Similar signs of disunity within ‘barbarian’ elites had precipitated Byzantine intervention in Vandal Africa and Ostrogothic Italy in the preceding thirty years. The invasion of *Hispania* may thus be interpreted as the final stage in Justinian’s *renovatio imperii* in the western Mediterranean; in the very least it was intended to secure strategically-important sea lanes by establishing control over important coastal cities such as Cartagena and Málaga.

The province that was established in the south and southeast of the Iberian Peninsula in the aftermath of the invasion was known as *Spania* and endured until the 620s, at which point it was

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² For standard studies, see: L. A. García Moreno, ‘La organización militar de Bizancio en la Península Ibérica (ss. VI-VII)’, *Hispania*, 33 (1973), 5-22.; M. Vallejo Girvés, *Bizancio y la España tardoantigua. (ss. V-VIII): un capítulo de historia mediterránea* (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, 1993); J. Vizcaíno Sánchez, *La presencia bizantina en Hispania, siglos VI-VII: la documentación arqueológica* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2009).

finally overcome by the forces of King Swinthila. Given that it existed for such a short space of time and the extant evidence is actually rather patchy, 'Byzantine Spain' has received an inordinate amount of attention in scholarship. Two key debates have been the extent of the territories controlled by the Byzantines and the nature of their relationship with the Visigothic kingdom.

It has recently been suggested that the concept of 'central places' has considerable benefits for understanding the articulation of territories of the Iberian Peninsula in the post Roman period. Central places are settlements 'at the centre of a region in which certain types of products and services are available to consumers', articulating the region and its inhabitants in socio-political and ideological terms. The presence of central places 'creates, maintains, and reinforces territorial articulation and hierarchy.'³ In light of the uncertain attribution of sites to either 'side' in the Byzantine-Visigothic conflict, it is imperative that scholars take account of the geography of a region when attempting to understand how territory was organized and controlled in late antiquity. Analysis of the highlands of Granada in this context reveals that elites, whether 'Visigothic', 'Byzantine' or unattributed (i.e. local/ regional leaders), seem to have devoted particular attention to the control of route foci and elevated defensive sites, key features of central places that have been identified in the north of the Iberian Peninsula for this period, but which so far have not been applied to the evidence for the south.

This article begins by summarising the varying positions on the Byzantine presence in the Iberian Peninsula, especially on the extent to which the border between territories under Visigothic control and those under Byzantine control was militarized. We then move on to examine the history of the highlands of Granada, an inland region in the southeastern part of the Iberian Peninsula, through analysis of the (limited) historical sources, the pre-existing material record, more recent archaeological surface surveys and a small number of excavations.

The territorial extent and defences of Byzantine *Spania*

In recent years there has been a increase in studies of the Byzantine presence in the Iberian Peninsula. A focus of debate has been on the existence, form and scope of the frontier, often termed *limes* in modern historiography, between Byzantine and Visigothic territories.⁴ One of the

³ J. Martínez Jiménez and C. Tejerizo García, 'Central Places in the Post-Roman Mediterranean: Regional Models for the Iberian Peninsula', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, 28 (2015), 81-103 (pp. 82-83).

⁴ L. A. García Moreno, 'Fuentes protobizantinas de la Hispania tardo-antigua (siglos V-VIII)', *Erythea*, 9 (1988), 11-22; L. A. García Moreno, 'La historia de la España visigoda: líneas de investigación (1940-1989)', *Hispania*, 175 (1990), 619-36; M. Vallejo Girvés, 'La investigación española del periodo protobizantino', *Mainake*, 31 (2009), 281-8.

key starting points for this debate was a series of studies in the mid-1940s by Goubert that identified a clear boundary between Visigothic and Byzantine territories, using the limited textual sources and, especially, lists of bishops that attended church councils of the Catholic church under the Visigoths to draw conclusions about which sees belonged to each side.⁵ Goubert's position on the size of the Byzantine territories can be described as 'maximalist', extending west beyond the mouth of the Guadalquivir River and into the modern day Algarve and inland into the province of Baetica (which corresponds roughly to modern Andalucía).⁶

In his classic monograph, *The Goths in Spain*, Thompson offered an alternative view of the expansion and retraction of the Byzantine presence in the south and the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula.⁷ Thompson suggested that the Byzantines controlled a narrow coastal strip from the area of *Gades* (modern Cádiz) in the west to the coast of Alicante. He argued that Byzantine territories were much circumscribed, especially in comparison to Goubert. Thompson's vision of the limits of Byzantine control is summarized, alongside the more recent work of Arce, on Figure 1.⁸

Disagreement over the extent of Byzantine possessions in Spain has been firmly connected to ongoing debate over the nature of provincial boundaries. Initially, Spanish historians were largely in agreement that there was a clearly delimited and fortified border between the Visigoths and Byzantines, based on textual references in the works of Isidore of Seville and Paul the Deacon.⁹ Minimal consideration was given to the archaeological evidence, due to the limited number of excavations.¹⁰ Subsequent work by García Moreno, Salvador Ventura, Vallejo Girvés and Martí Matias has reiterated the presence of a clearly articulated frontier system, the so-called 'double *limes*'.¹¹ This system is supposedly composed of two elements: (1) a front line of fortified posts (*castra et castella*); and (2) a second line based on the fortified cities that were located to the rear

⁵ P. Goubert, 'Byzance et l'Espagne wisigothique (554-711)', *Revue Études Byzantines*, 2 (1944), 5-78; P. Goubert, 'L'administration de l'Espagne byzantine, I: les gouverneurs de l'Espagne byzantine', *Revue Études Byzantines*, 3 (1945), 127-42; P. Goubert, 'L'administration de l'Espagne byzantine, II: Les Provinces', in *Revue Études Byzantines*, 4 (1946), 71-110. The argument was that the absence of bishops from Visigothic church councils signified that their bishopric belonged to the Byzantine province, limiting their attendance.

⁶ P. Goubert, 'L'administration de l'Espagne byzantine, II'. According to this criterion, the following cities could be ascribed to Byzantine control: *Corduba*, *Carthago Spartaria*, *Egabro*, *Iliberri*, *Illici*, *Elipa*, *Malaca*, *Mentesa*, *Ossonoba*, as well as the Balearic Islands.

⁷ E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 320-34.

⁸ J. Arce, *Esperando a los árabes. Los visigodos en Hispania (507-711)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2011).

⁹ Isidore of Seville, *History of the Goths* 49; Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards* 3. 21.

¹⁰ M. Vigil and A. Barbero, *Sobre los orígenes sociales de la Reconquista* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974), pp. 71-75.

¹¹ García Moreno, 'La organización militar'; F. Salvador Ventura, *Hispania Meridional entre Roma y el Islán. Economía y sociedad* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1990), pp. 38-46; Vallejo Girvés, *Bizancio y la España tardoantigua*, pp. 376-7; M. R. Martí Matías, *Visigodos, Hispano-romanos y bizantinos en la zona valenciana en el siglo VI (España)* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2001), pp. 16-32.

of fortified front line. This vision of a double *limes* derives, ultimately, from Diehl's work, published at the end of the nineteenth century, on Byzantine defences in the north of Africa, which suggested that a front line of well-fortified settlements and other posts (*castella*) occupied by small garrisons was supported, in the rear, by a second line of larger fortified towns defended by larger numbers of troops.¹² Proponents of the double *limes* theory drew parallels between the defensive system that was adopted in Africa and those that they claimed to be able to identify in the south and southeast of the Iberian Peninsula.¹³

¹² C. Diehl, *L'Afrique Byzantine, Histoire de la domination byzantine en Afrique* (Paris: Leroux, 1896), p. 142.

¹³ E.g. comparisons were made with the research on Carthage carried out by D. Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest, an account of the military history and archaeology of the African provinces in the sixth and seventh centuries* (Oxford: John and Erica Hedges, 1981), pp. 140-5.

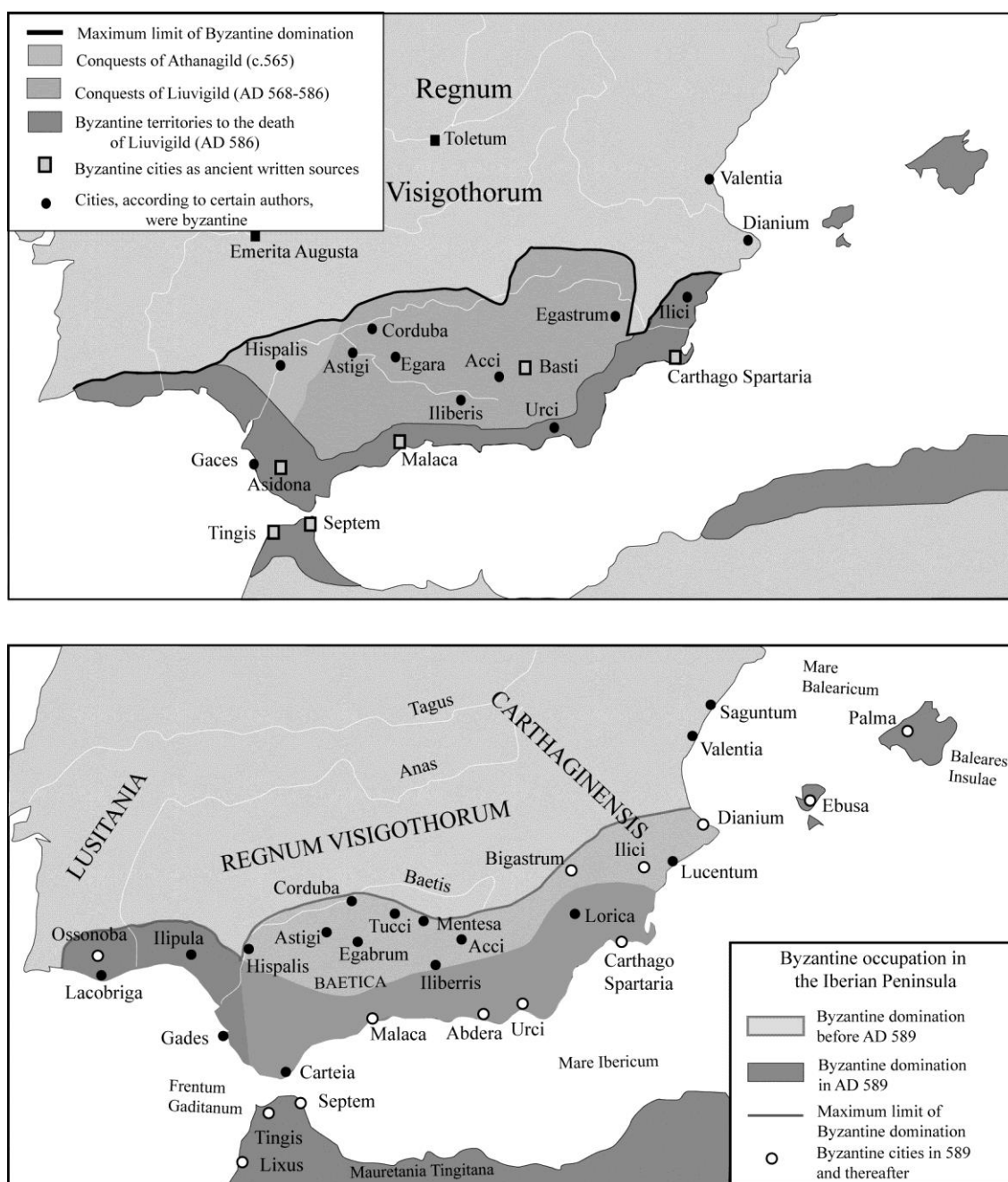


Figure 1: Byzantine territories in Hispania according to Thompson (1969: upper map) and Arce (2011: lower map). © J. A. Salvador Oyonate.

An extreme minimalist stance has been adopted by scholars such as Ripoll and Montanero Vico, both of whom deny the existence of a frontier between the Byzantines and the Visigoths in the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁴ They argue that the archaeological and textual evidence is insufficient to support the double *limes* theory and that the prestige of historiographical discourse around the

¹⁴ G. Ripoll López, 'Acerca de la supuesta frontera entre el Regnum Visigothorum y la Hispania bizantina', *Pyrenae*, 27 (1996), 251-67 and 'On the Supposed Frontier between the regnum gothorum and Byzantine Hispania', in *The Transformation of Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, ed. by W. Pohl, I. Wood and H. Reitmitz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 95-116; D. Montanero Vico, 'La problemática sobre el limes bizantino en la Península Ibérica: ¿Realidad histórica o construcción historiográfica?', *Ex novo: revista d'història i humanitats*, 2 (2005), 45-64.

‘Byzantine presence’ in Spain has led to an overestimation of the extent and importance of imperial territories there.

An intermediary position has been taken by Ramallo and Vizcaíno, who, while doubting the applicability of the *limes* theory, are more inclined to accept that certain defensive enclaves and fortified sites were established in the interior, strategically located to control routes linking Byzantine-controlled cities in the interior with urban centres on the coast, such as Cartagena and Málaga.¹⁵ Wood, while doubting the existence of a frontier system inland, argued that the Byzantines controlled extensive territories there, focused on the control of the communications network, and engaged in extensive bureaucratic and diplomatic activity to control, defend and exploit their holdings.¹⁶ More recent work has focused on the frontier as a space within which interaction between Byzantines and Visigoths took place and which developed over time rather than as a fixed boundary line.¹⁷

It is important to note that the assertion of Visigothic control over the Byzantine territory was gradual and should be understood in the broader context of Visigothic conquest of peripheral regions of the Iberian Peninsula (e.g. Suevic *Gallaecia*, regions such as the Orospeña, which borders on the highlands of Granada, the subject of this article). Likewise, there can have been no organized frontier between the Visigoths and the Byzantines from the 550s until the late-560s and 570s for the simple fact that their territories were not contiguous. It is also significant that the evidence of material culture such as ceramics suggests continued interactions between Byzantine Spain and the rest of the western Mediterranean (and further afield), as well as trading with territories in the interior such as the Granada highlands. Material culture in this region thus points to connectivity between Visigothic and Byzantine Iberia, not necessarily to differentiation.¹⁸

Byzantine intervention and central places in *Spania*

The initial Byzantine landing may have taken place at Cartagena, the port city that was later to become capital of the province of *Spania* and was traditionally the capital city of the province of

¹⁵ S. F. Ramallo Asensio and J. Vizcaíno Sánchez, 'Bizantinos en Hispania. Un problema recurrente en la arqueología española', *Archivo Español de Arqueología*, 75 (2002), 313-32.

¹⁶ J. Wood, 'Defending Byzantine Spain: Frontiers and Diplomacy', *Early Medieval Europe*, 18 (2010), 292-319.

¹⁷ See Wood, 'Defending Byzantine Spain', pp. 307-309, for the concept of 'zones of interaction'. See P. Poveda Arias, 'El concepto de frontera en la Hispania tardoantigua: de *limes* a *confinium*', in *Los Lugares de la Historia*, ed. by J. M. Aldea Celada, C. López San Segundo, P. Ortega Martínez, M. de los Reyes de Soto García and F. J. Vicente Santos (Salamanca: AJHIS, 2013), 1157-81 for the suggestion that a frontier could extend to include an entire geographical region. See A. V. Frey Sánchez, 'Sobre la articulación administrativa de la cuenca del río Segura entre los siglos VII y VIII: algunos recientes elementos para identificar una frontera "blanda"', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie III: Historia Medieval*, 29 (2016), 313-36 for the concept of a 'soft frontier'.

¹⁸ Vizcaíno Sánchez. *La presencia bizantina en Hispania*.

Carthaginiensis, in 552/3.¹⁹ Málaga is another candidate as it was an important port and came under Byzantine control rapidly. Recent historical and archaeological studies have suggested that the Byzantine territories may have extended further inland than was previously acknowledged, although the relatively short time for which *Spania* existed and the absence of a clearly identifiable 'Byzantine' material culture in the province is problematic for drawing firmer conclusions.²⁰ Reynolds made the perceptive point that although we know that the Byzantines controlled the coastal cities of Cartagena and Málaga, there 'was a lot of space in between that may have had no garrisons or Byzantine presence as such. One cannot join up the dots and create a single Byzantine "province" or territory.'²¹

Despite these limitations in the evidence, church council records imply that the Byzantines control the territories of bishoprics rather than restricting their activities to cities alone. The administration of such provinces may have been more extensive than was imagined, with governors, judges, soldiers and even tax collectors referenced either explicitly or implicitly in our sources.²² A recently discovered land survey document reinforces the impression that the Byzantines went to considerable effort to administer their holdings.²³ However, despite the more thoroughgoing administration of the province than has often been envisaged by scholars, the rapid occupation of the Balearic Islands and *Septem* (modern Ceuta) on the coast of north Africa, alongside much of the southern coast of the Iberian Peninsula, suggests that the initial aim of Byzantine intervention was to assert control over the western Mediterranean.²⁴ The province seems to have been linked for administrative purposes to Byzantine Africa, a connection that is also reflected in the material record.²⁵

The lack of sources means that it is difficult to determine the exact territorial extent of Byzantine possessions in the south in the 550s and 560s. References in the written sources suggest that the following sites were under Byzantine control during this period (if not for all of it): *Carthago Spartaria* (Cartagena), *Malaca* (Málaga), *Asidona* (Medina Sidonia), *Sigontia* (Gigón, Jerez de

¹⁹ J. Vizcaíno Sánchez, 'Avances en la definición de un patron arqueológico de la *Spania* bizantina', *Ianua Classicorum. Temas y formas del Mundo Clásico*, 111 (2015), 185-92.

²⁰ Vizcaíno Sánchez, 'Avances en la definición', p. 186.

²¹ P. Reynolds, *Hispania and the Roman Mediterranean AD 100-700 ceramics and trade* (London: Duckworth, 2010), p. 298 (n. 436).

²² Wood, 'Defending Byzantine Spain'.

²³ O. Olesti and R. Andreu, 'Una nueva fuente documental sobre Hispania-Spania. El *Ars Gromaticæ Gisemundi* y la *Discriptio Hispaniae*: actividades agrimensorias en época romana y bizantina', *Gerión*, 34 (2016), 351-81.

²⁴ Wood, 'Defending Byzantine Spain'.

²⁵ For administration, see: M. Vallejo Girvés, 'Byzantine Spain and the African Exarchate: An administrative Perspective', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 49 (1999), 13-23; for material culture, see: Vizcaíno Sánchez, 'Avances en la definición'.

la Frontera) and *Basti* (Cerro del Quemao, Baza). Epigraphic and archaeological evidence augments this list further, adding *Begastri* (Cabeza de Roenas, Cehegín, Murcia), *Abula* (Abla, Almería), and *Baria* (Villaricos, Almería).²⁶ In summary, in the early phases of *Spania*'s history, Byzantine domains can with some security be said to have incorporated: the southern part of the modern-day province of Cádiz; the mountains of the province of Málaga²⁷ (not including the Hoya of Antequera); a strip along the coast of the present province of Granada (maybe extending inland to the pass of Ízbor) and the southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada (and an important part of the highlands of Granada with which this article is concerned); most of the provinces of Almería and Murcia; and coastal areas in present province of Alicante. Byzantine control probably did not extend as far north as the city of *Valentia* (Valencia).²⁸ This evidence suggests that some efforts were made to establish dominance over a broad strip of territory along the southern coast. However, should the Byzantines have wished to extend their control inland, they would have faced the difficult task of negotiating and potentially conflicting with a number of different local and regional power groups, as well as with the Visigothic kings to the north.

The urban spaces of the Byzantine territories have been ascribed their place within the typologies that have been developed to assess the applicability of central place theory to the Iberian Peninsula in late antiquity. The main Byzantine cities have been described as 'coastal military bases' that were connected to similar sites on the coast of Byzantine north Africa, the garrisons of which were supplied directly by the imperial *annona*. Evidence for the military status of these sites is provided by the construction of fortifications, inscriptions and the discovery of military equipment in excavations.²⁹ The Byzantine presence is said to account for the development of this specific type of central place, apparently not found elsewhere in the Peninsula. However, it may be that settlements further inland yet possibly within Byzantine territory, in the highlands of Granada, for instance, also conform to typologies identified elsewhere. For example, hilltop settlements have been proposed as a type of central place in the northern Meseta in the fifth and sixth centuries, while hilltops and commercial entrepôts also seem to have played a key role on the northern coast. The highlands of Granada witnessed a general move of population to more elevated sites during late antiquity, including at main towns such as *Basti*. This seems to have occurred for a variety of reasons, including: defence; exploitation of territory, especially rich agricultural land and mining resources; and control of the road network and fluvial system. One of the central purposes of this

²⁶ Salvador Ventura, *Hispania Meridional entre Roma y el Islán*, p. 38.

²⁷ M. Carrilero Millán, O. García Vélchez and B. Padial Robles, 'El marco histórico de la Antigüedad Tardía de la Serranía de Ronda: la villa romana de Cuevas del Becerro (Málaga)', *CVDAS*, 7-8 (2006-7), 117-42.

²⁸ E. Juan Navarro and I. Pastor Cubillo, 'Los visigodos en Valencia, Pla de Nadal ¿una villa aúlica?', *Boletín de Arqueología Medieval*, 3 (1989), 137-79.

²⁹ Martínez Jiménez and Tejerizo García, 'Central Places', pp. 92-3.

article is to suggest that while the ‘coastal military bases’ type might apply to the main cities of *Spania*, other central places existed within the highlands of Granada and presumably elsewhere in the province. Such central places may have operated at a different scale level to the provincial capital at Cartagena, but for local populations they still played a vital role in providing security and control, and in enabling the effective exploitation of the territory by elites.

As we shall see, a wide range of literary, documentary, epigraphic and numismatic evidence points to the gradual intensification of Visigothic control over the highlands of Granada at the expense of the Byzantines during the last decades of the sixth century and the first decades of the seventh century. However, the sum total of these references is insufficient to draw definitive conclusions about the nature of interactions between the two sides or even about the territory that they contested. Archaeological evidence drawn from excavation and field survey can augment our understanding of the development of this region, as can observations based on its geography. The following sections provide the geographical and archaeological baseline from which more detailed analysis of the developing conflict between the Byzantines and the Visigoths can proceed through examination of specific sites in relation to theories about central places.

The highlands of Granada: Archaeology, Topography, and Territorial Control

Although there have been few excavations in the highlands of Granada, a number of surface archaeological surveys have been conducted in recent decades and their cumulative effect has been to enable scholars to chart the development of settlement patterns within the region over several historical phases. Nearly 140 archaeological sites have been documented for the sixth and seventh centuries, 52 of which appear to have been new foundations (Fig. 2).³⁰ Although it is difficult to establish an exact timeline, the chronology of these sites has been established through analysis of ceramics, with late antique sites characterized by an increasing presence of hand-made and wheel-thrown materials, including: jugs, bowls, boiling-pans, bread-bins, jars, lids.³¹

³⁰ J. A. Salvador Oyonate, 'La Bastitania romana y visigoda. Arqueología e Historia de un territorio' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad de Granada, 2011), p. 568; J. A. Salvador Oyonate, 'Bastetania (II): Tiempo de convulsiones y oscuridad. Hispanos, bárbaros, bizantinos y musulmanes (siglos V al IX d. C.)', *Péndulo. Papeles de Bastitania*, 14 (2014), 9-45.

³¹ M. Alba Cazado and S. Gutiérrez Lloret, 'Las producciones de transición al mundo islámico: el problema de la cerámica paleoandalusí (siglos VIII y IX)', in *Cerámicas hispanorromanas: Un estado de la cuestión*, ed. by D. Bernal Casasola and A. Ribera i Lacomba (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 2008), pp. 585-616.

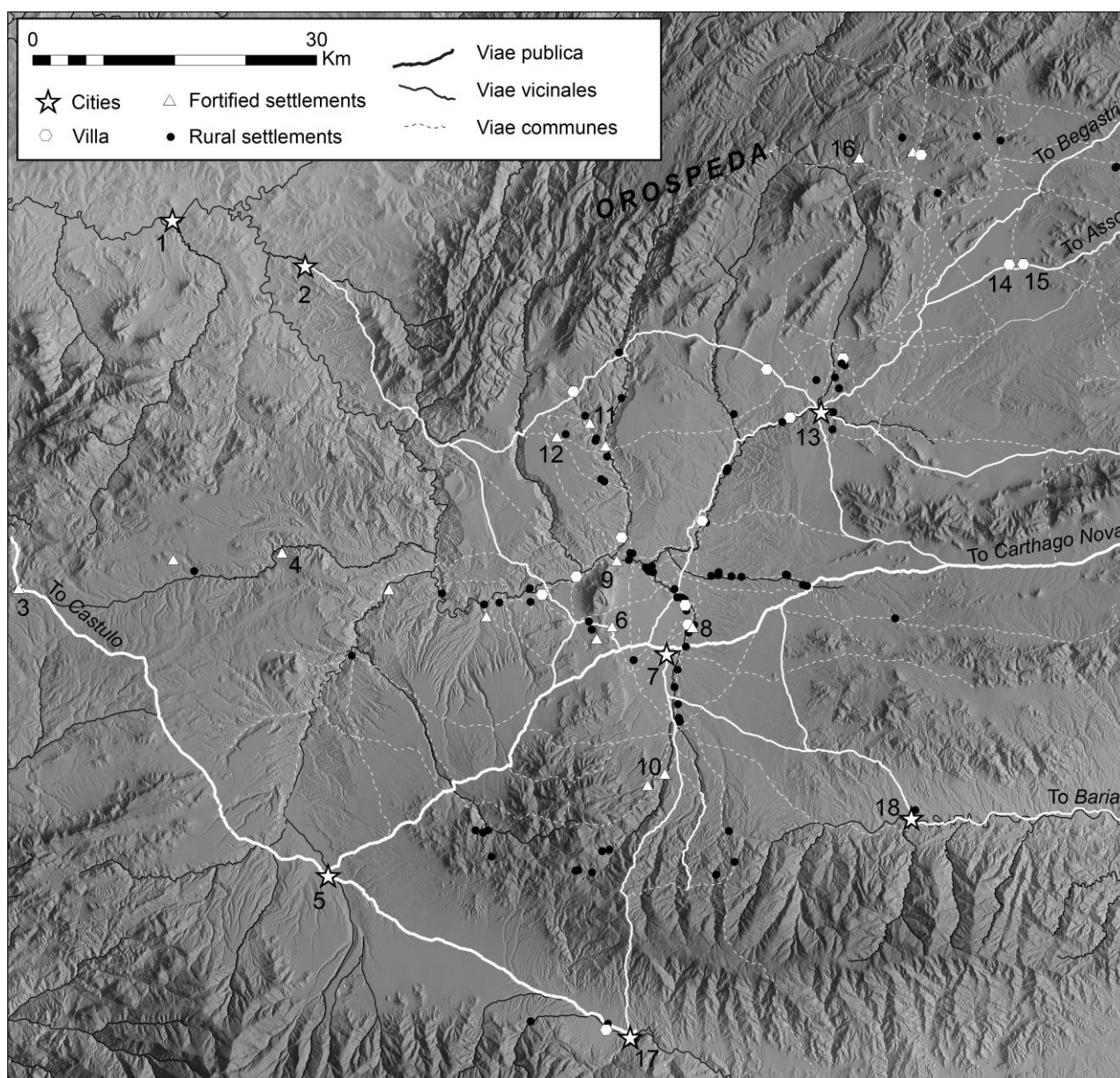


Figure 2. Late antique sites and roads in the highlands of Granada. 1, *Salaria*; 2, *Tugia*; 3, *Cerro del Castillo*; 4, *Peñón de Alamedilla*; 5, *Acci*; 6, *Cejo de Catín*; 7, *Cerro Cepero*; 8, *Cerro del Quemao*; 9, *Castellón de Benzalema*; 10, *Cerro del Tullido*; 11, *Peñón del Lobo*; 12, *Fuente de la Cerraila*; 13, *Tutugi*; 14, *Casas del Duque*; 15, *Bugéjar*; 16, *Castellón de las Hoyas*; 17, *Alba*; and 18, *Tagili*. ©Alejandro Caballero Cobos

In terms of fine ceramic material, the third century is marked by the presence of African Red Slip Wares (ARS) from northern Tunisia.³² The beginning of the importation of ARS is marked by the presence of *Clara C*, which is relatively common in this area and is almost always found in the same shape, type Lamboglia 40/Hayes 50. From the second half of the fourth century these sources

³² M. Mackensen and G. Schneider, 'Production centres of African red slip ware (3rd-7th c.) in northern and central Tunisia: archaeological provenance and reference groups based on chemical analysis', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 19 (2006), 163-90.

are replaced by others from a new series, *Clara D* (ARS), most represented by the following types: Hayes 58B, 61A, 61B, 63/64, 80B, 87A, 88, 91C, 93, 94, 99, 99B, 99C, 104A, 104B and 106, as well as Late Roman C (Focaean Red Slip Wares) in form Hayes 3C and E.³³ The fourth century is marked, especially in inland areas such as the highlands of Granada, by Southern Late Hispanic *terra sigillata* (TSHTM)³⁴ and is very common in all the deposits in the area. Indeed, TSHTM is typically found all across the highlands of southeastern Spain, where it was produced in the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁵ At higher status sites it is found alongside the imported African fine wares mentioned previously, while at other sites it is found alone.³⁶ It is important to mention three forms in particular: (1) the oldest, TSHTM 1, endures over time (at least until the sixth century); (2) TSHTM 2, a deep bowl which is almost contemporaneous with THSTM 1 but less frequent; (3) TSHTM 9, which is characteristic of the later period. The sixth century is characterised, according to excavations on the southeastern coast, by the presence of Hayes 103, 99C, 104C, 105, 107 and 108, while Hayes forms 91D and 109 are indicative of the early seventh century.³⁷

In terms of amphorae, the following types deriving from the high empire have been identified: the typical Dressel series 7/11, Dr. 2-4 (although less prevalent), Gala 4, a southern Spanish coastal production, and, even rarer, some Dressel 20 of the lower Guadalquivir. There are also the *garum* amphorae such as Beltran II (in its two variants), Almagro 51, and Tripolitana type 3 from North Africa. For later stages, some eastern amphorae, specifically productions that contained imported Gazan wine (LRA4a type) have been found at Cerro Cepero (*Basti*) and can be dated to the sixth century. These ceramic types cover a wide chronological range, from the fourth to the seventh centuries, suggesting that some sites were occupied across the period. There is even evidence of intensified occupation of certain sites in the sixth and seventh centuries, as in other regions in post-Roman Iberia and elsewhere in the western Mediterranean.³⁸

In terms of settlement patterns, in the highlands of Granada, there seems to have been a shift of settlement to more elevated sites with defensive potential during late antiquity, a pattern that has

³³ E. García Vargas and J. Vázquez Paz, 'Poblamiento rural en las campiñas al sur del Guadalquivir', *Anejos de Archivo Español de Arqueología*, 61 (2012), 235-61.

³⁴ A. López Marcos and A. M. Adroher Auroux, 'Un asentamiento rural romano en las estribaciones septentrionales de Sierra Nevada. Cortijo Cecilio (Fiñana, Almería)', in *1ª Conferencia Internacional Sierra Nevada. Conservación y Desarrollo Sostenible*, 5 vols (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1996), IV, ed. by J. Chacón and J. L. Rosúa, pp. 11-28.

³⁵ Reynolds, *Hispania and the Roman Mediterranean*, p. 67, 165 (Fig. 7), 264 (n. 267).

³⁶ M. Orfila Pons, 'La vajilla Terra Sigillata Hispánica Tardía Meridional', in *Cerámicas hispanorromanas. Un estado de la cuestión*, ed. by D. Bernal Casasola and A. Ribera i Lacomba (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 2008), pp. 541-552.

³⁷ Ramallo Asensio and J. Vizcaíno Sánchez, 'Bizantinos en Hispania'.

³⁸ C. Mas Florit and M. Ángel Cau Ontiveros, 'From Roman to Byzantine: The Rural Occupation of Eastern Mallorca (Balearic Islands)', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, 24 (2011), 191-217.

been noted elsewhere in the south of the Iberian Peninsula in this period.³⁹ Such realignments have been linked to increasing insecurity after of the breakdown of Roman authority during the fifth century, although on some sites occupation (or reoccupation) began in the preceding two centuries.⁴⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that twenty-five of the sites that have been identified by survey and excavation have possible defensive characteristics, such as walls, while in other cases the site's topography would have facilitated its defence.

The topography of the highlands of Granada means that there are a limited number of communication routes. A relatively small number of strategic sites, often elevated, potential defensive positions thus facilitate the control of territory and its communication network. For example, many of the roads through the region run alongside rivers, both of which are often overlooked by settlements with defensive characteristics such as those located at Cerro de la Juaierea, at Cejo Catín, Fuente de la Cerraila, Peñón del Lobo and Cerro del Campillo near to the junction of the Castril and Guadiana Menor rivers, and the route between Baza and Zújar⁴¹. The *Via Augusta*, the main Roman road through the region and especially the rich agricultural territory of the Hoya de Baza, connects its main cities (*Basti* and *Acci*), with one another and with the capital of the Byzantine province, *Carthago Spartaria* on the coast. Control of this area would have been necessary for any group wishing to extend their power inland from the coast or to approach Byzantine cities on the coast.

The importance of controlling this area, with the capacity to transport and support larger numbers of troops is made plain by the fact that it is the part of the highlands where the greatest number of sites with defensive characteristics has been found.⁴² Most of these sites are located on the East bank of the Baza river, including Rabotes and, further south, the Cerro del Quemao, the location of the city of *Basti* after the abandonment of Cerro Cepero in the fourth century. Further south, in the northern foothills of the Sierra de Baza, the elevated settlements of Barrazales and Cerro del Tullido could have served defensive purposes and/or controlled nearby mining operations. Although the southern branch of the *Via Augusta* and several secondary roads connect *Acci* and

³⁹ K. E. Carr, *Vandals to Visigoths. Rural Settlement Patterns in Early Medieval Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 142-6; P. Reynolds, *Settlement and Pottery in the Vinalopó Valley (Alicante, Spain) AD. 400-700* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1993).

⁴⁰ Cf. T. Lewit, *Villas, Farms and the Late Roman Rural Economy (Third to Fifth Centuries AD)* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004). D. Fernández, 'City and Countryside in Late Antique Iberia', *Antiquité Tardive*, 21 (2013), 233-241 (p. 234).

⁴¹ A. Caballero Cobos, 'Vías de comunicación en las comarcas de Baza y Huéscar: una aproximación histórico-arqueológica desde la Prehistoria reciente a la Edad Media' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad de Granada, 2014), p. 237; 270-271; 465-466; 485; 486; 747.

⁴² Salvador Ventura, *Hispania Meridional entre Roma y el Islán*, p. 43: located in the Hoya de Baza and the area of *Abula* (Abla, Almería).

Salaria (Úbeda, Jaén) to the plateau dominated by *Basti* and onwards to the Almanzora river and the harbor at *Baria* (Villaricos, Almería), access is by no means easy due to the elevation of the route (500-600m) and the intervention of the narrow valley of the Guadiana Menor river.

Communication to the north and west with territories that may have come under Visigothic control in the first half of the sixth century was funneled via three mountain ranges: the Sierra Nevada, (heights of upto 3,478 metres); the Sierra Arana (2,027m); and the Sierra Mágina (2,164m). As elsewhere in the region, routes through these mountains, such as the road between the important cities of *Acci* and *Iliberri* (Granada), could generally be managed through control of a limited number of elevated defensive sites. The westward continuation of the *Via Augusta* from *Acci* to *Mentesa Bastia* (La Guardia, Jaén) followed the Guadahortuna river and, as in the case of the Hoya de Baza, this important route was abutted by a high number of defensive sites.



Figure 3. Some of the most prominent defensive sites. A: Benzalema, B: Alamedilla (possible Accatucci), C: Cerro del Tullido (*Basti*). © CEAB

An overall survey of the archaeological evidence suggests that occupation of the land in the region was uneven. Areas with a higher occupation levels in the sixth and seventh centuries were those with richer agricultural land such as the Hoya de Baza and the Castril river valley. Deposits at Bugéjar, Cortijo de la Merced Baja, Casa Moya and Cortijo del Duque, located in the drainage basin now known as Llanos de Bugéjar, also offered opportunities for the exploitation of good quality farmland.⁴³ Some areas that had previously experiences high settlement density witnessed a reduction with concentration of populations at specific locations. For example, to the north of the highlands of Granada, in the region of Orospeña, only two active settlements have been identified in the plain of Bugéjar: Cortijo del Duque and Bugéjar, both of which are located in the modern municipality of Puebla de Don Fadrique (Granada). There seems to have been a shift in population away from lowland sites to more elevated locales in this area. For example, three settlements with potential defensive characteristics have been located at Castellón de las Hoyas (all within the Puebla de Don Fadrique). A number of settlements from this period also seem to have been related to activities associated with mineral extraction (mainly iron), especially along the northern slope of Sierra Nevada and Sierra de Baza.⁴⁴

The topography of the region and associated archaeological survey (as well as excavations such as those at *Basti*, to be discussed below) thus suggests that efforts were made to control key access points through the occupation of nearby defensive points, often in elevated positions. Where natural access was easier, infrastructure more developed (e.g. sites along the *Via Augusta*) or land was richer in agricultural or mineral resources, defensive organisation seems to have been intensified. Out limited textual sources suggest that armed conflict between the Byzantines and the Visigoths seems mainly to have taken the form of raiding rather than conquest, especially in the first two decades after the establishment of *Spania* in the 550s. The control of natural defensive locations, as well as the provision of additional fortifications at some sites, would enable a relatively small number of troops to control key routes through the region and provide local populations with refuge points.⁴⁵ However, the occupation of elevated and hilltop sites may also

⁴³ For the occupation of the north of the province of Granada, see: A. M. Adroher and A. López (eds.), *El territorio de las altiplanicies granadinas entre la Prehistoria y la Edad Media. Arqueología en Puebla de D. Fadrique (1995-2002)* (Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, 2004).

⁴⁴ L. J. García Pulido and A. Caballero Cobos, 'Vestigios de minería hidráulica de época romana en la explotación aurífera de las Hoyas del Tullido (Caniles, Granada)', *Péndulo. Papeles de Bastitania*, 16 (2015), 17-38. Caballero Cobos, 'Vías de comunicación', pp. 267-8.

⁴⁵ Arce, *Esperando a los árabes*, p. 109.

have facilitated the more effective socio-economic exploitation of the territory by local elites. We need not necessarily see settlement realignments relating to 'international' conflicts as in opposition to the interests of local elites in the development of central places.

Central places in the highlands of Granada: Local power, the control of territory and the Byzantine-Visigothic conflict

The Highlands of Granada and neighbouring areas

The Byzantine strategy of establishing control of port cities and islands was mirrored inland with efforts by both the Byzantines and Visigoths to take over the communication network of the interior through the conquest of key points on the road system. The need to control central places and the road network seems to have driven forward Byzantine efforts to control the highlands of Granada as this both secured their coastal territories and opened up the potential for expansion inland. Yet, the occupation of such 'central places' would have been vital in the efforts of local elites to ensure the efficient control and exploitation of local populations. Of course, the interests of local elites and external polities need not have been in opposition. Research has shown that one of the factors in the success of the Visigoths in the north of the Iberian Peninsula was their ability to coopt powerful groups on the periphery of the kingdom into their rule.⁴⁶

A cluster of sites around Cerro del Castillo (modern municipality of Montejícar, Granada), including Cruz de los Nudos, Cierzo de Castilla, Calar del Moro, Solana de los Corrales and Hoya del Abad, may have formed a defensive system. Several of these sites occupy higher land and would have facilitated control of the communication network – such as the branch of the *Via Augusta* that connects with the Guadalquivir valley – and of neighbouring agricultural territories. Although a Visigothic-era necropolis has also been found in the area, it is impossible, without further evidence, to establish whether these settlements were organized as part of campaigns against Byzantine territories.⁴⁷ It seems more likely that such settlement patterns were a response of local communities and their leaders to the increased insecurity of the fifth and sixth centuries, as was happening all across the peninsula – and indeed across the post-Roman west more generally – at the same time.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ S. Castellanos and I. Martín Viso, 'The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, 500-1000', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), 1-42.

⁴⁷ C. Pérez, I. Toro and M. A. Raya, 'Necrópolis hispanorromanas y visigodas en la provincia de Granada', in *III Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española*, 2 vols (Oviedo, 1992), II, pp. 110-20.

⁴⁸ R. Francovich and R. Hodges, *Villa to village: The transformation of the Roman Countryside in Italy, c.400-1000* (London: Duckworth, 2003); Z. Kobylinski, 'Early medieval hillforts in polish lands in the 6th to the 8th centuries: problems of origins, function, and spatial organization', in *From the Baltic to the Black Sea: studies in medieval archaeology*, ed. by D. Austin and L. Alcock (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 147-56; L. Schneider, 'Oppida et castra tardo-antiques à propos des établissements de hauteur de la Gaule Méditerranéenne', in *Les campagnes de la*

In the Orospeña region, to the north of the highlands of Granada, there is a similar pattern: the occupation of elevated sites, often in positions with natural defensive features and/or possible fortifications, seemingly articulated in relation to the road network and the control of local resources. These settlements include the fortified sites of Castellón de las Hoyas and Cortijo de la Merced, the latter of which is located alongside the road that connects the region with the north of the province of Murcia. Together they dominate a large mountainous area with rich pastures for cattle, forests and agricultural lands. Collectively, these settlements control access to the region and its agricultural wealth, which seems to have been focused on raising livestock in late antiquity. As far as we know, the Orospeña was never controlled by the Byzantines and only conquered by the Visigoths in 577. This settlement pattern therefore cannot have been the work of the Byzantines, although it may be that local power groups sought to organize their defenses in order to manage interaction with imperial territory. It seems much more likely, therefore, that the development of elevated settlements provided local populations with added security at the same time as permitting them to maintain control of key agricultural land and the transport network.

In the highlands of Granada, occupation of the cities of *Basti* (Baza) and *Acci* (Guadix) in the mid-550s established Byzantine dominance over the *Via Augusta*, the road connecting the key imperial cities of Cartagena and Málaga. This move also facilitated access to the upper Guadalquivir valley and the valley of the river Genil, opening up routes into the interior.⁴⁹ The occupation of the highlands thus served a number of strategic purposes, maintaining the overland connection between Byzantine holdings in *Carthaginiensis* (centred on Cartagena) and *Baetica* (centred on Málaga), opening up opportunities for future expansion, and establishing control over some relatively rich agricultural land. Such expansion is unlikely to have been directed against the Visigoths, or at least not against them alone, for in the mid-sixth century we encounter references to a number of independent powers in the south of the Peninsula. Some are described by our sources as being based on cities such as Córdoba, while others were given regional descriptors

Gaule à la fin de l'Antiquité, ed. by P. Ouzoulias, C. Pellecuer, C. Raynaud, P. Van Ossel and P. Garmy (Antibes: Éditions APDCA, 2001), 433-48.

⁴⁹ K. F. Stroheker, 'Das spanische Westgotenreich und Byzanz', *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 163 (1963), pp. 252-74; Ripoll, 'Acerca de la supuesta frontera', p. 157; P. C. Díaz, 'En tierra de nadie: visigodos frente a bizantinos. Reflexiones sobre la frontera', in *Bizancio y la Península Ibérica. De la Antigüedad Tardía a la Edad Moderna*, ed. by I. Pérez Martín and P. Bárdenas de la Peña (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004), p. 37-60. L. A. García Moreno, *Leovigildo. Unidad y diversidad de un reinado* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2008), p. 47.

(e.g. Orospeđa).⁵⁰ The highlands of Granada thus served an important function in the early years of *Spania*, acting as a key communication point and opposing independent powers to the north.

A key turning point came when, in 570, King Liuvigild (569-586) launched a campaign against the *Basti* and *Malaca*.⁵¹ At the point Liuvigild probably managed to gain control of the city of *Acci* (Guadix), a key point on the *Via Augusta*, although it seems that his hold on *Basti* was temporary. These actions threatened the integrity of the Byzantine province and limited the opportunities for intervention in support of the Hispano-Roman population of the city of Córdoba, which until this point in time had been independent of Visigothic control, although later chroniclers depicted it as in rebellion from Visigothic control until it was conquered in 584.⁵² In 577 Liuvigild sought to consolidate his control over Orospeđa, another region, like Córdoba, that abutted the Granada highlands and in which local elites had long maintained independence from Visigothic control. John of Biclarum notes that Leovigild suppressed a rebellion of the *rustici* there and occupied many *civitates et castella*.⁵³ Liuvigild's campaigns against *Orospeđa* and Córdoba were presumably preparatory to another attempt on *Basti*, although we should not rule out the possibility that the raid on *Basti* in 570 was intended as a warning to imperial commanders not to interfere in his efforts to bring peripheral (probably independent) areas, like Orospeđa and Córdoba, under Visigothic hegemony.

Liuvigild also seems to have sought to preclude Byzantine intervention prior to dealing with other enemies within *Hispania*. This is especially clear in the case of the main challenge in the later part of his reign, the rebellion of his son, Hermenegild (d. 585). Local resistance to Visigothic attempts to bring southern parts of the Iberian Peninsula under royal control is well illustrated by the Hermenegild's rebellion. This episode also reflects the fact that Byzantine intervention outside *Spania* was judged to be a real possibility. Hermenegild, who was probably given a southern command by his father, sought and seems to have obtained the support of the Byzantines. This is

⁵⁰ John of Biclarum, *Chronicle* 572. 2; 577. 2; F. Salvador Ventura, 'Fortissimae civitates meridionales en los siglos VI y VII d.C.', in *Estudios sobre las ciudades de la Bética*, ed. by C. González Román and A. Ramón Padilla Arroba (Granada, Universidad de Granada, 2002), p. 447-461.

⁵¹ John of Biclarum, *Chronicle* 570. 2: 'Liuvigildus Rex loca Bastitanieae et Malacitanæ urbis repulsis militibus vastat, et victor solio redit'. For a long time scholars accepted that *Basti* was conquered by Leovigild in 570: H. Gelzer, *Georgii Cyprii Descriptio orbis romani* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1890), p. 32; F. Görres, 'Die Byzantinische Besitzungen an den Küsten des spanisch-westgotischen Reiches (554-624)', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 16 (1907), 515-38; F. J. Presedo, *La España bizantina* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2003), p. 44 (the original doctoral thesis on which this work is based was completed in the 1950s); L. A. García Moreno, *Historia de España Visigoda* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1989, p. 115; Salvador Ventura, 'Fortissimae civitates meridionales'.

⁵² García Moreno, *Leovigildo*, p. 48.

⁵³ John of Biclarum, *Chronicle* 577. 2: 'Liuvigildus Rex Orospeđam ingreditur et civitates atque castella eiusdem provinciae occupat et suam provinciam facit. Et non multo post inibi rustici rebellantes a Gothis opprimuntur et post haec integra a Gothis possidetur Orospeđa.'

evidenced by the presence of Bishop Leander of Seville as ambassador in Constantinople in the first half of the 580s.⁵⁴ Although Hermenegild was besieged in *Hispalis* (Sevilla) in 583 and later captured in *Corduba*, Gregory of Tours reports that Leovigild had thought it prudent to pay the Byzantine commander 30,000 *solidi* to recall Byzantine forces.⁵⁵ An attack on a monastery in the area around Sagunto by Leovigild's troops has also been interpreted as a warning to the Byzantines not to intervene on the 'wrong side' in the campaign against Hermenegild.⁵⁶ After the defeat of the rebellion, Hermenegild's wife and son sought refuge in Byzantine territory and were taken to the court of Emperor Maurice (582-602) in Constantinople.⁵⁷ Byzantine involvement in the rebellion of Hermenegild is thus a strong possibility and similar interventions were certainly possible in regions that bordered the Granada highlands, such as Cordoba and the Orospeña, especially in the period 550-570 when the Visigoths were struggling to assert control of the south.

Basti

It may have been during, or in preparation for, the campaign to take control of the Orospeña in 577 that *Basti* and neighbouring walled settlements, such as those located in Puebla de Don Fadrique (Granada), fell under Visigothic control.⁵⁸ In any case, Basti must have fallen to the Visigoths either before or in the early stages of Reccared's reign (586-601) because its bishop, Theodorus, subscribed to the acts of the Third Council of Toledo in 589. He did so alongside Lilliosus of Acci. They seem to have been relatively junior, suggesting that they had been recently appointed.⁵⁹

Basti was a key urban site in the region and especially important for maintaining control of communications, both with the coast and inland via the *Via Augusta*. It also dominated the rich agricultural hinterland of the Hoya de Baza. Excavations conducted at Cerro Cepero, the site of Ibero-Roman *Basti* point clearly towards partial occupation, concentrated on the highest part of the hill, during the sixth and seventh centuries. The partial occupation of the site, the transformations of the high imperial buildings and the abandonment of the rest of the site, suggests that the population declined during the fourth and fifth centuries. It seems that in its place a nearby site,

⁵⁴ M. R. Martí Matias, *Visigodos, Hispano-romanos y bizantinos en la zona de valenciana en el siglo VI (España)* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2001, p. 19. García Moreno, *Leovigildo*, p. 118.

⁵⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Ten books of History* 5. 38.

⁵⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Libri in gloria confessorum* 12; Vallejo Girvés, *Bizancio y la España tardo antigua*, pp. 206–207.

⁵⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Ten books of History* 6. 40; Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards* 3. 21; Fredegar, *Chronicle* 3. 87. M. Vallejo Girvés, 'Un asunto de Chantaje. La familia de Atanagildo entre Metz, Toledo y Constantinopla', *Polis*, 11 (1999), 261-79.

⁵⁸ J. Fernández Palmeiro and D. Serrano Várez, 'Broche de cinturón visigodo procedente de Puebla de D. Fadrique, Granada', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*, 12 (1995), 595-598. See also Adroher and López, (eds.), *El territorio de las altiplanicies granadinas*.

⁵⁹ L. A. García Moreno, *Prosopografía del Reino visigodo de Toledo* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1974), p. 152; García Moreno, *Leovigildo*, p. 79.

Cerro del Quemao, rose to prominence because a stone altar referring to bishop Eusebius of *Basti* (633) has been found there.⁶⁰



Figure 4. Plan of the walls of the Cerro Cepero-*Basti* forum area (BAZ-001), based on analysis of ceramic materials collected in the excavation campaign of 2015. © CEAB

Excavations have also revealed what could be the remains of a Christian church, built upon structures from the imperial period. Decorative architectural elements such as capitals, columns and Visigothic *cimacium*, as well as the presence of burials in the main nave of the church (Fig. 4), point towards a religious function. Future excavations are planned to explore further the functionality and chronology of the structure. Initial results, however, point towards some similarities to sites elsewhere in the borders between Visigothic and Byzantine territories, such as at *Ilunum* (El Tolmo de Minateda, Hellín, Albacete), a settled plateau with defensive characteristics that potentially controlled access inland from the Byzantine capital at Cartagena to the Visigothic capital at Toledo. At *Ilunum*, as may have been the case at *Basti*, ecclesiastical

⁶⁰ A. Caballero, E. Gimeno, M. Ramírez and I. Sastre, "Tablero de altar de época tardoantigua hallado en Baza (Granada). ¿El primer documento epigráfico del obispo Eusebio?", *Archivo Español de Arqueología*, 79 (2006), 287-92.

construction took place in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, as the two sides vied for control of the region and political conflict came to be paralleled by religious disputes.⁶¹

The importance of religious factors in relations between the Visigoths and the Byzantines is underlined by the conversion of the Visigoths from Arianism to Catholicism, which was celebrated at the Third Council of Toledo in 589. This conversion meant that the Visigoths were no longer seen as heretics by the Catholic population of the Peninsula, including the bishops of *Spania*. It coincided with renewed Byzantine interest in Iberia. In 589 an inscription was raised at Cartagena, capital of *Spania*, to the governor *Comenciolus* that emphasized Byzantine dominance over the barbarian enemies.⁶² *Comenciolus* seems to have been sent from the east to reinforce the defences of the city, perhaps the province more generally, and it has been argued that the final decade of the sixth century witnessed a series of local campaigns against the Visigoths.⁶³

Acci

The most important city in the highlands of Granada was *Acci* (modern Guadix) and it played a vital role in articulating power relations within the region and in the developing conflict between Byzantines and Visigoths at the end of the sixth century. Known in the imperial period as *Colonia Iulia Gemella Acci*, it was converted into a military colony sometime between 17 and 13 BC. The recently discovered Roman theatre and the status of the city as a mint in the early imperial period underscores its importance, as does the epigraphic record.⁶⁴

⁶¹ L. Abad Casal and S. Gutiérrez Lloret, 'Iyih. (El Tolmo de Minateda, Hellín, Albacete): Una civitas en el limes visigodo-bizantino', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*, 14 (1997), 591-600; L. Abad Casal, S. Gutiérrez Lloret, B. Gamo Parras and P. Cánovas Guillén, 'Una ciudad en el camino: pasado y futuro de El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete)', *Zona Arqueológica*, 6 (2008), 323-36.

⁶² *CIL* II, 3420. *ILS*, 835. M. Vallejo Girvés, '*Comentiolus, Magister militum Spaniae missus a Mauricio Augusto contra hostes barbaros*: The Byzantine Perspective on the Visigothic Conversion to Catholicism', *Romano-Barbarica*, 14 (1996-7), 289-306; J. M. Abascal and S. F. Ramallo, *La ciudad de Carthago nova: La documentación epigráfica*, (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1997), p. 208; P. Fuentes Hinojo, 'Sociedad, ejército y administración fiscal en la provincia bizantina de Spania', *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua*, 16 (1998), 301-30. S. F. Ramallo, 'Carthago Spartaria, un núcleo bizantino en Hispania', in *Sedes Regiae (400-800)*, ed. by G. Ripoll and J. Gurt (Barcelona: Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres, 2000), pp. 579-611; S. F. Ramallo and J. Vizcaíno, 'Bizantinos en Hispania. Un problema recurrente en la arqueología española', *Archivo Español de Arqueología*, 75 (2002), 313-32; J. Vizcaíno, *La presencia bizantina en Hispania (siglos VI-VII). La documentación arqueológica* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2007), p. 78. J. Vizcaíno, 'Carthago Spartaria, una ciudad hispana bajo el dominio de los milites romani', in *Recópolis y la ciudad en época visigoda*, ed. by L. Olmo Enciso, L. Abad Casal, A. Gómez de la Torre-Verdejo and J. L. Bonor (Alcalá de Henares: Museo Arqueológico Regional, 2008), pp. 339-360.

⁶³ Vallejo Girvés, *Bizancio y la España tardoantigua*, p. 238.

⁶⁴ *CIL*. II, 3391, 3393, 3394. J. Vives, *Inscripciones cristianas de la España romana y visigoda* (Barcelona: Instituto Erique Flórez, 1969), pp. 165-6. F. Chaves Tristán, 'Las monedas de Acci', *Numisma*, 138-143 (1976), 141-58. A. López Marcos, 'El teatro romano de Colonia Iulia Gemella Acci (Guadix, Granada)', in *Teatros romanos de Hispania*, ed. by J. F. Noguera, J. M. Songel and V. Navalón (Valencia: Universitat Politècnica de València, 2016), pp. 75-95.

Acci was walled and this would have provided a place of refuge in our period, while in spite of the difficulties of conducting field surveys in modern Guadix and its suburbs, three other strategically located settlements have been identified. Majada de las Vacas, which developed into an important site in the late medieval period, is located between the two roads that connected *Acci* with *Iliberri* (Granada) and the south of the modern province of Jaén.⁶⁵ The site of El Forruchu, an ancient Iberian *oppidum*, seems to be reused in late antiquity to control the northern branch of the *Via Augusta* near to its intersection with the western branch.⁶⁶ El Forruchu also facilitated control over the fertile Fardes river valley. Piedras de la Solana (possible ancient *Accatucci*?), a site of approximately 7 ha. with numerous surface structures, occupies a defensive position on the western branch of the *Via Augusta*, next to the Guadahortuna river. A series of sites in the Fardes river valley linked by road to *Bactara* (Los Villares de Valdemanzano, Dehesas de Guadix) and *Iliberri* (Granada) have also been identified. As in other parts of the highlands of Granada, sites with strong natural defences near to the road network and river system seem to have been occupied in late antiquity. The fact that numerous surface structures are visible at some of these sites suggests that systematic excavation would deepen our understanding of their origin and development. It is clear that such sites were occupied in order to facilitate control over territory and the transport network, while such sites would also have provided security for the local population.⁶⁷ However, in the absence of more detailed written evidence or extensive excavation of late antique layers in the city of *Acci* and its territory, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about when such sites were put into use and whether the initiative came from the Visigoths, the Byzantines, local leaders, or a combination that evolved over time.

⁶⁵ M. Bertrand, J. Sánchez and J. A. Garrido, 'Poblamiento y territorio en la región de Guadix-Baza durante la época medieval', *Anuario Arqueológico de Andalucía*, 1 (1998), 56-67.

⁶⁶ This site has been identified as the *mansio* of *Bactara* by P. Sillières, *Les voies de communication de L'Hispanie méridionale* (Paris: Université de Bordeaux III, 1990), pp. 398-9.

⁶⁷ Díaz, 'En tierra de nadie'.



Figure 5. The archaeological remains of the Roman theatre of Acci (Guadix), with the cathedral in the background. Building materials were despoiled from the theatre from the fourth century to the ninth AD. Courtesy of Antonio López Marcos

King Reccared responded to Byzantine aggression in the aftermath of his conversion (587-9) with a campaign of his own, although our source offers no information about its location.⁶⁸ Irrespective of whether or not this aggression was directed against Byzantine possessions in or near to the Granada highlands or elsewhere in *Spania*, during Reccared's reign the city of Acci seems to have become the political and military capital of Visigothic-controlled territories in the region. The establishment of the bishopric at Acci further underlines the importance of the city.⁶⁹ Another indication of the interest of the Visigoths in establishing their control over the territory of Acci through the construction of buildings is an inscription that refers to the three churches of *Nativola*.⁷⁰ The inscription demonstrates that in 594 Bishop Lilliolus of Acci consecrated the

⁶⁸ Isidore, *History of the Goths* 54: 'Saepe etiam et lacertos contra Romanorum insolentias [...].'

⁶⁹ M. Vallejo Girvés, 'Las sedes eclesiásticas hispano-bizantinas en su incorporación al reino visigodo de Toledo', *Cassiodorus*, 6-7 (2001), 13-35.

⁷⁰ *CIL*, II, 5, 652 (=IHC 115; ILCV 1815; ICERV 303; ILPGR 152). Y. Duval, 'Nativola-les-trois-églises (Évêché d'Acci, 594-607) d'après Vives, ICERV, 303', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, 103 (1991), 807-882. M. Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 289-290. I. Velázquez Soriano, 'Baselicas multas miro opere constuxit (VSPE, 5.1.1). El valor de las fuentes literarias y epigráficas sobre la edilicia religiosa en la Hispania visigoda', *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 13 (2007), 161-8 (p. 262); D. Rico Camps, 'Arquitectura y epigrafía en la Antigüedad Tardía. Testimonios hispanos', *Pyrenae*, 40 (2009), 7-53;

church of St Vincent Martyr. In 607, during the reign of Witteric, who also fought against the Byzantines, a later Bishop of *Acci*, Paulus, consecrated the church of St Stephen at *Nativola*.⁷¹ The inscription also records the consecration of a church of St. John the Baptist, although we do not know its date or the name of the bishop responsible. Finally, the inscription informs us about the construction of three tabernacles (*tabernacula*) – not churches – by a certain Gundiliuva, possibly a Visigothic noble, although the exact time and place are not mentioned on the inscription.⁷²

In the decades after the Visigoths took control of *Acci* at least two churches were therefore built in the surrounding area as Visigothic kings and nobles emphasized their new Catholic faith. Useful parallels might be drawn with the establishment of Visigothic power further north, at El Tolmo de Minateda at around the same time, a process that was outlined above in relation to the development of *Basti*. It has long been recognized that the conversion of the Visigoths to Catholicism at the end of the 580s led to increased hostility with the Byzantines, not rapprochement. The situation at *Acci* seems to have replicated that elsewhere in the southern borderlands as the Visigoths sought both to exert control over and win the support of local populations through patronage of the church.⁷³

There are further, if rather vague, references in written sources to Visigothic-Byzantine conflicts during the reign of Gundemar (r. 610-2).⁷⁴ A significant development and an indication of the relative importance of *Acci* was the founding of a mint in the reign of King Sisebut (r. 612-21).⁷⁵ Andrew Kurt has argued persuasively that the foundation of mints at *Acci* and other cities in the south was closely connected to Visigothic campaigns against Byzantine territories. On this interpretation, coinage was minted to pay forces that were campaigning against the Byzantines and/or to remint Byzantine coinage before it entered Visigothic territory.⁷⁶ Further evidence for Sisebut's interest in the region comes from a law of 612, which instructs Cicilius, the bishop of

J. Carbonell and H. Gimeno, 'A vueltas con la placa de Nativola (CIL II/5, 652). Nuevos elementos para la reflexión', in *Sylloge Epigraphica Barcinonensis*, 7 (2010), 73-96.

⁷¹ Isidore, *History of the Goths* 58: 'Namque adversus militem Romanum praelium saepe molitus, nihil satis gloriose gessit praeter quod milites quosdam Segontiae per duces obtinuit.'

⁷² A possibility previously underlined by Duval, 'Nativola-les-trois-églises' and Carbonell and Gimeno, 'A vueltas con la placa de Nativola'.

⁷³ M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumph Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 303-314. J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World* (London: Psychology Press, 1999), p. 8.

⁷⁴ Isidore, *History of the Goths* 59: 'Gundemarus post Wictericum regnat an. II. Hic Vascones una expeditione vastavit, alia militem Romanum obsedit.'

⁷⁵ J. Vico and M. C. Cores, «La moneda visigoda», *Gaceta numismática*, 169 (2008), 23-37. Chaves Tristán, 'Las monedas de Acci'.

⁷⁶ A. Kurt, 'Visigothic minting and the expulsion of the Byzantines from the south in the early seventh century', *The Picus*, 5 (1996), 133-66.

Mentesa Bastia, to monitor the activities of the Jews in some of the towns near his diocese.⁷⁷ *Tutugi* is mentioned explicitly and the fact that the nearby bishop of *Acci* and *Basti* were not given responsibility for oversight and the more distant bishop of *Mentesa Bastia*, suggests either that they were not firmly under Visigothic control or that the bishops of these cities were relatively inexperienced because they had only recently been appointed.⁷⁸ The Byzantines captured Cicilius (possibly in 614 or 615) and he is mentioned in diplomatic exchanges between Sisebut and Caesarius, the imperial governor, which suggests that imperial forces were not too distant from his see.⁷⁹

After these references in the early years of Sisebut's reign, the cities of the Granada highlands are not mentioned in written sources until after the Byzantine province was destroyed in the mid-620s during the reign of King Swinthila. The written references in the 610s and the flurry of other activities such as the establishment of mints and church building by Visigothic nobles suggest that the remainder of the highlands fell to the Visigoths during the 610s. Such a development would have sundered the two halves of Byzantine territory from one another, if Malaga had not already been taken, leaving Cartagena vulnerable to Swinthila's advances in the 620s. Once the inland holdings of the Byzantines had been taken, the coastal enclaves did not survive for very long, further underlining their importance to the integrity of *Spania*.

Conclusion

The highlands of Granada witnessed a gradual assertion and intensification of Visigothic control after the initial Byzantine intervention in the 550s. This was part of Visigothic efforts to bring peripheral areas of the Iberian Peninsula under control. Although later sources present cities such as Córdoba as being in rebellious opposition to Visigothic rule in the mid sixth century, it is highly likely that such cities were largely, if not entirely, independent of outside control (Visigothic or Byzantine) and that the establishment of royal authority there depended on military intervention. Once they had been conquered, such cities soon became bases for Visigothic aggression against Byzantine territories further south, including in the Granada highlands.

⁷⁷ *Lex Visigothorum* 12. 2. 13: 'Sanctissimis ac beatissimis Agapio, Cecilio, ítem Agapio episcopis sive iudicibus ibídem institutis, similiter et reliquis sacerdotibus vel iudicibus in territoria Barbi, Aurgi, Sturgi, Ilturgi, Viatia, Tuia, Tutugi, Ebabro et Epagro consistentibus.' F. Salvador Ventura, 'El poblamiento en la provincia de Granada durante los siglos VI-VII', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*, 5 (1988), 339-51. M. Vallejo Girvés, 'Obispos exiliados y confinados en monasterios en época protobizantina', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*, 21 (2004), 511-23.

⁷⁸ The Ibero-Roman city of *Tutugi* (Cerro del Real, Galera) was partially excavated in the early twenties of the last century (*CIL*. II, 3406; *Inscripciones Latinas de la Provincia de Granada*, 25, 26, 27 and 28). As was the case with other sites examined so far, a number of small farms seem to have been active in the area around *Tutugi*, which functioned as a central place and also served as a defensive point in relation to *Orospeda*.

⁷⁹ *Epistolae Wisigothicae* 3. Wood, 'Defending Byzantine Spain', pp. 309, 318; on date, see Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, p. 162.

In the highlands of Granada a similar process seems to have occurred, albeit at a smaller scale. Written and archaeological evidence reveals that its cities fell first to the Byzantines and then to the Visigoths, the latter then consolidating their power through the construction of churches and the establishment of mints at places like *Acci*. This facilitated the exploitation of the richest agricultural land in the region, the control of the communications network and generated the infrastructure to support increasingly aggressive policies against the Byzantines. Similar developments seem to have taken place at strategic sites in other borderlands between the Byzantines and Visigoths, such as at El Tolmo de Minateda to the north.

A number of sites have been located in the highlands of Granada with strong defensive characteristics. The region analysed in this article may thus have encompassed a more organized defensive system that has hitherto been identified. Pre-existing settlements at defensible sites would have controlled access to the road network with the use of relatively small numbers of troops. In this regard, there are similarities with Byzantine defensive systems in Italy and the East. However, while there may have been a connection between the occupation of defensive sites as part of an overall strategy and the desire to control and exploit territory, studies elsewhere have shown that this would not always have been the case – a range of other factors are likely to have played a role in the selection of sites.⁸⁰ One such factor may have been the close proximity of watercourses, another phenomenon that has been observed in studies of Byzantine territories in the west.⁸¹ However, while sites in the highlands of Granada were often located near to rivers, it is difficult to ascertain whether this was due to a desire to ‘control’ the fluvial system, to ‘exploit’ the river’s resources (water, fish) or because an increased perception of insecurity meant that local populations wanted their water supply closer at hand. Of course, a combination of factors is likely to have been in play in the selection of any site.

The ‘frontier’ between Byzantine and Visigothic zones was by no means impermeable and this is made clear from the ceramic evidence of the Granada highlands and the fact that such strenuous efforts were made to exert control over the road network. There is considerable evidence for the transfer of goods across the putative border, especially imported African ceramics, and it may be that elements of the population had economic interests on both sides of the ‘border’, as seems to have been the case in Italy.⁸² The posited reminting of coinage also suggests connectivity rather

⁸⁰ Mas Florit and Cau Ontiveros, 'From Roman to Byzantine', pp. 202-203, 208.

⁸¹ Mas Florit and Cau Ontiveros, 'From Roman to Byzantine', pp. 201, 209.

⁸² E. Zanini, *Introduzione all'archeologia bizantina* (Roma: Nuova Italia scientifica, 1998), pp. 211-213, 216.

than separation between Byzantine and Visigothic Iberia. This connectivity between populations in territories under the control of opposed polities underscores the important point that frontier zones are as much about the interactions of central powers with local populations, particularly elites, as they are about “international” politics. This highlights the importance of comparative regional and micro-regional studies that look for both similarities and differences across time and space.⁸³

A final point that is worth making is that ‘central place’ should not be seen as some sort of synonym for ‘city’. Studies of Iberian cities and the countryside in late antiquity have identified a number of common features, but also considerable variation, as we have found in the highlands of Granada.⁸⁴ The evidence of the highlands of Granada suggests that central places operated at various scale levels. Attention focuses on cities because written sources are so often concerned with them and in the case of the south of the Iberian Peninsula writers such as John of Biclarum and Isidore of Seville base their narratives of Visigothic power on victories over the Byzantine (and independent) cities of the south. Yet the settlements in the highlands of Granada seem to have been organized into a sort of hierarchy operating at varying scale levels. Cities such as Basti and Acci were undoubtedly central places around which territory was articulated but elsewhere clusters of smaller settlements seem to have been organized around central places, while central places were clearly related to one another, for example by the communication network. Basti and Acci, in turn, over time, seem to have come increasingly under the central authority of the Visigothic monarchy and church. Undoubtedly, more work, including excavation, needs to be done in the highlands of Granada and elsewhere to examine the (inter-)relationships between central places, including between cities, and their hinterlands.

⁸³ On the importance of such regional and comparative approaches more generally, see: C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 831.

⁸⁴ Fernández, 'City and Countryside', pp. 235, 239.